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SUBJECT: IRAQI MOD - QUELLING VIOLENCE TOP PRIORITY

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: At an August 7 working lunch, Ambassador Khalilzad and Minister of Defense Abdul Qader al-Mufraji discussed the current security situation, relations with the Ministry of Interior (MOI), MOD reforms and future plans, the regional environment, and ideas for reforming MOI. Al-Mufraji agreed with the Ambassador that the security threat to Iraq includes both terrorism and inter-sectarian death squads and that both must be confronted simultaneously. Al-Mufraji is pleased with MOD,s progress and announced that it plans to recruit and train thirty thousand new soldiers by March 2007. He stressed that MOD is free from ethno-sectarian politics and is loyal to the Iraqi state. Regarding regional relationships, al-Mufraji commented that Iran seeks to keep Iraq weak and the Coalition forces busy. He discounted AQI,s claim to be the defender of Iraq,s Sunnis, commenting that it has killed not only Shia, but many Sunnis in Iraq. NOTE: Al-Mufraji,s comments on the security threat suggest possible difference of opinion with PM. END SUMMARY.

Baghdad Security Slowly Improving

¶2. (S) The Ambassador commented that Baghdad security is the most important immediate issue and that it is critical to establish security on the streets. Noting that on previous occasions the Minister commented that security is both a military and political problem, the Ambassador asked for his opinion of PM Maliki,s political efforts in support of the Baghdad Security Plan. While praising the PM,s efforts, al-Mufraji acknowledged that he is reluctant to employ some of the security plan,s more aggressive components for fear of alienating Baghdad residents. Al-Mufraji noted that this limits MOD,s options and complained that politicians express narrow concerns to Maliki that interfere with the strong military measures (including large-scale joint Iraqi/MNF-I operations) necessary to improve the situation. Al-Mufraji noted that some politicians even suggested that a strong Iraqi military effort could lead to a coup. He said he was working to gain the confidence of not only the people, but also the PM, adding that the MOD would gain that trust &by its actions.⁸ Asked to assess the current Baghdad situation, al-Mufraji commented that the past few days have seen some positive trends toward national reconciliation, with violence appearing to decline in Baghdad,s Saydiyah, Ameriya, Jihad, Khadra, and Doura districts. He also added that the situation in Al Anbar province was stable and continues to improve.

Who is the Threat?

13. (S) The Ambassador commented that many Iraqi political leaders consider the main security threats to be from terrorists and Ba'athists; believing that if these groups are neutralized, sectarian violence will diminish. However, the Ambassador commented that both he and General Casey consider the threat to be both terrorists and sectarian death squads. Al-Mufraji agreed with the Ambassador's assessment and added that to bring about security both terrorists and death squads must be defeated simultaneously. In his opinion, the death squads currently are more dangerous. The terror cells have been degraded and the Ba'athists are now limited to mainly financing criminals and AQI to sow chaos and instability in order to weaken the Unity government.

14. (C) The Minister added that death squads (both Shi'a and Sunni) emanate from militia extremists who, along with political agitators, have created a cycle of violence. Moreover, any armed group outside government control should be considered a potential death squad. This includes: commercial protection companies (noting that some have over ten thousand employees); criminal gangs; and sectarian militias. All of these groups conduct violence for hire (including serving as death squads) and must be brought under control. Al-Mufraji was hopeful that the recent political progress made by the Maliki would enable the Iraqi forces to conduct effective operations against all these elements.

Qader's Opinions on MOI

15. (C) Al-Mufraji described MOD/MOI cooperation as good, but

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noted that MOI suffers from poor discipline and corruption. He believes that many problems stem from an flawed development plan that was driven by politics, lacked standards, and had no vetting for its personnel. The Ambassador suggested that MOD and MOI jointly form an internal affairs department to conduct undercover operations to help root out certain types of corruption. This unit should try to illegally purchase/rent weapons, vehicles, etc. from corrupt officials and then arrest them. The Minister agreed that this would be a good idea: corrupt personnel often perceive that there is little supervision and no sanctions for their bad behavior and that such a program would undercut this misperception by making arrests and setting examples.

16. (C) Minister al-Mufraji lauded the current Minister of Interior, Jawad al-Bolani, for his reform efforts, but believes he needs to be bolder. However, he acknowledged that this may be difficult because Bolani lacks the background for the job, and many senior MOI personnel are politically connected, making it hard to fire them. He joked that MNF-I must continue providing Bolani with good advisors.

Asked how he would improve MOI, al-Mufraji said that he would simplify its organizational structure, vet its leadership for corruption and loyalty to the state, and improve the command/control of the National Police.

MOD Is Making Good Progress

17. (C) Al-Mufraji said that MOD is sound because it was created with a logical and non-political plan, and with proper personnel vetting. As a result, it is a reliable force independent of ethno-sectarian politics, loyal to the Iraqi state, and possessing good people and high morale. He stated that all MOD personnel from the Minister to the individual soldier must now take an oath forswearing loyalties to political parties at the expense of the state. This program would be complete by early September.

¶8. (C) Al-Mufraji acknowledged that MOD still suffers from inefficiencies in the Ministry and Chief of Staff, but that MOD was adjusting its force structure to fix them. He stated that the Coalition's training program continues to improve MOD's performance and he is very pleased with it. Qader commented that one of the notable strengths of the post-Saddam military is in counter-terror operations, which did not exist in the previous era. Having served in both, the Minister rates the current Iraqi military five times better than the old one, but also noted that it has a much more difficult job.

Additions to Iraqi Forces

¶9. (C) Al-Mufraji outlined a new phased program to add an additional thirty thousand soldiers to the Iraqi Army. The program will begin August 15 and will consist of three recruitment and training programs each running five weeks to be conducted over the next eight months. This will greatly improve the overall quality of the army, allow for efficient casualty replacement, and complete MOD's unit manning plan. It will also provide the basis for the formation of additional brigades and battalions in the army, to include two division headquarters (one in Baghdad to augment the 6th Division and one to be stationed in Salah ad Din). He said the program was jointly conceived and planned with MNF-I and has been briefed to PM Maliki.

Iran, Al Qaida, Media Perceptions

¶10. (C) During lunch, the Minister agreed with the Ambassador's assessment that, while Iran ought to be happy with a stable, non-hostile Iraq) especially as many present leaders are former Iranian exiles) it instead seeks to destabilize it. Al-Mufraji added that Iran seeks to keep Iraq weak and the Coalition busy. He discounted AQI's claim to be the defender of Iraq's Sunnis, saying that AQI considers all those who disagree with it (either Shi'a or Sunni) as infidels and that it has killed many Sunnis in Iraq. Regarding Iraqi border security, the Minister said it has improved, but more must be done, especially along the border with Syria.

¶11. (C) Al-Mufraji expressed frustration that the media

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focuses exclusively on Baghdad, while failing to acknowledge that many regions of the country (and parts of Baghdad itself) are stable. Still, he agreed with the Ambassador that Baghdad security is critical and that it must not appear to be a city out of control. He understood that the success of the Baghdad Security Plan is critical and emphasized that the MOD will work to establish a secure environment until this goal is achieved.

¶12. (S) COMMENT: The Minister's comments affirming his belief in the role of death squads in Iraqi security problems are at odds with several senior Shi'a Iraqi political leaders, notably PM Maliki (at least in his more recent statements) and VP Abdul Mahdi. As a Sunni, al-Mufraji might be expected to not exclusively blame terrorists (read Ba'athists); however, given that his opinion was seconded at a later meeting by Interior Minister Bolani, a Shi'a, suggests a possible major difference of opinion between PM Maliki, senior Shi'a politicians, and Iraq's two most important security ministers. Al-Mufraji's opinions also suggest the perception that Iraqi instability results from not only terrorist and sectarian pressures, but from an overall environment of lawlessness. END COMMENT.
KHALILZAD